The Old Bell at Sumaya, Ladrone Islands. Cast in 1680. Reproduced from an illustration in "Go to Manila."

A Native House in the Ladrone Islands. Drawn from an illustration in "Go to Manila."

SALOMY JANE'S KISS.

BY BRET HARTE.

CHAPTER I.

Only one shot had been fired. It had gone wide of its mark, the ringleader of the vigilantes, and had left Red Pete, who had fired it, covered by their rifles and at their mercy, for his hand had been cramped by hard riding and his eye distracted by their sudden onset, and so the inevitable end had come. He submitted sullenly to his captors. His companion fugitive and horse thief gave up the protracted struggle with a feeling not unlike relief. Even the hot and vengeful victors were content. They had taken their men alive. At any time during the long chase they could have brought them down by a rifle shot, but it would have been unsportsmanlike and have ended in a free fight instead of an example. And, for the matter of that, their doom was already sealed. Their end by a rope and a tree, although not sanctioned by law, would have at least the deliberation of justice. It was the tribute paid by the vigilantes to that order which they themselves had disregarded in the pursuit and capture. Yet this strange logic of the frontier sufficed them and gave a certain dignity to the climax.

"Ef you've got anything to say to your folks, say it now, and say it quick," said the ringleader.

Red Pete glanced around him. He had been run to earth at his own cabin in the clearing, whence a few relatives and friends, mostly women and children, noncombatants, had overflowed, gazing vacantly at the 20 vigilantes who surrounded them. All were accustomed to scenes of violence, blood feud, chase and hardship. It was only the suddenness of the onset and its quick result that had surprised them. They looked on with dazed curiosity and some disappointment. There had been no fight to speak of, no spectacle. A boy, nephew of Red Pete, got upon the rain barrel to view the proceedings more comfortably. A tall, handsome, lazy Kentucky girl, a visiting neighbor, leaned against the doorpost, chewing gum. Only a yellow hound was actively perplexed. He could not make out if a hunt were just over or beginning and ran eagerly backward and forward, leaping alternately upon the captives and the captors.

The ringleader repeated his challenge. Red Pete gave a reckless laugh and looked at his wife, at which Mrs. Red Pete came forward. It seemed that he had much to say, incoherently, furiously, vindictively, to the ringleader. His soul would roast in hell for that day's work! He called himself a man, skulking in the open and afraid to show himself except with a crowd of other "kiyis" around a house of women and children. Heaping insult on insult, inveighing against his low blood, his ancestors, his dubious origin, she at last flung out a wild taunt of his invalid wife, the insult of a woman to a woman, until his white face grew rigid and only that western American fetich of the sanctity of sex kept his twitching fingers from the lock of his rifle. Even her husband noticed it, and, with a half authoritative "Let up on that, old gal," and a pat of his freed left hand on her back, took his last parting. The ringleader, still white under the lash of the woman's tongue, turned abruptly to the second captive, "And, of you've got anybody to say goodby to, now's your chance."

The man looked up. Nobody stirred or spoke. He was a stranger there, being a chance confederate picked up by Red Pete and known to no one. Still young, but an outlaw from his abandoned boyhood, of which father and mother were only an ugly forgotten dream, he loved horses and stole them, fully accepting the frontier penalty of life for the interference with that animal on which a man's life so often depended. But he understood the good points of a horse, as was shown by the one he bestrode, until a few days before the property of Judge Boompointer. This was his sole distinction.

The unexpected question stirred him for a moment out of the attitude of reckless indifference, for attitude it was and a part of his profession, but it may have touched him that at that moment he was less than his companion and his virago wife. However, he only shook his head. As he did so his eye casually fell on the handsome girl by the doorpost, who was looking at him. The ringleader, too, may have been touched by his complete loneliness, for he hesitated. At the same moment he saw that the girl was looking at his friendless captive.

A grotesque idea struck him.

"Salomy Jane, you might do worse than come yere and say goodby to a dyin man, and him a stranger," he said.

There seemed to be a subtle stroke of poetry and irony in this that equally struck the apathetic crowd. It was well known that Salomy Jane Clay thought no small potatoes of herself and always held off the local swain with a lazy, nymphlike scorn. Nevertheless she slowly disengaged herself from the doorpost and, to everybody's astonishment, lounged, with languid grace and outstretched hand, toward the prisoner. The color came into the gray, reckless mask which the doomed man wore as her right hand grasped his left, just loosed by his captors. Then she paused. Her shy, fawnlike eyes grew bold and fixed themselves upon him. She took the chewing gum from her mouth, wiped her red lips with the back of her hand, by a sudden lithe spring placed her foot on his stirrup and, bounding to the saddle, threw her arms about his neck and pressed a kiss upon his lips.

They remained thus for a hushed moment, the man on the threshold of death, the young woman in the fullness of youth and beauty, linked together. Then the crowd laughed. In the audacious effrontery of the girl's act the ultimate fate of the two men was forgotten. She slipped languidly to the ground. She was the focus of all eyes, she only. The ringleader saw it and his opportunity. He shouted, "Time's up—forward!" urged his horse beside the captives, and the next moment the whole cavalcade was sweeping over the clearing into the darkening woods.

Their destination was Sawyers Crossing, the headquarters of the committee, where the council was still sitting and where both culprits were to expiate the offense of which that council had already found them guilty. They rode in great and breathless haste—a haste in which, strangely enough, even the captives seemed to join. That haste possibly prevented them from noticing the singular change which had taken place in the second captive since the episode of the kiss. His high color remained as if it had burned through his mask of indifference. His eyes were quick, alert and keen, his mouth half open, as if the girl's kiss still lingered there. And that haste had made them careless, for the horse of the man who led him slipped in a gopher hole, rolled over, unseated his rider and even dragged the bound and helpless second captive from Judge Boompointer's favorite mare. In an instant they were all on their feet again, but in that supreme moment the second captive had felt that the cords which bound his arms had slipped to his wrists. By keeping his elbows to his sides and obliging the others to help him mount it escaped their notice. By riding close to his captors and keeping in the crush of the throng he further concealed the accident, slowly working his hands downward out of his bonds.

Their way lay through a sylvan wilderness, middle deep in ferns, whose tall fronds brushed their horses' sides in their furious gallop and concealed the flapping of the captive's loosened cords. The peaceful vista, more suggestive of the offerings of nymphs and shepherds than of human sacrifice, was in a strange contrast to this whirlwind rush of stern, armed men. The westering sun pierced the subdued light and the tremor of leaves with yellow lances, birds started into song on blue and dovelike wings, and on either side of the trail of this vengeful storm could be heard the murmur of hidden and tranquil waters.

In a few moments they would be on the open ridge, whence sloped the common turnpike to Sawyers, a mile away. It was the custom of returning cavalcades to take this hill at headlong speed, with shouts and cries that heralded their coming. They withheld the latter that day as inconsistent with their dignity, but, emerging from the wood, swept silently like an avalanche down the slope. They were well under way, looking only to their horses, when the second captive slipped his right arm from the bonds and succeeded in grasping the reins that lay trailing on the horse's neck. A sudden vaquero jerk, which the well trained animal understood, threw him on his

She pressed a kiss upon his lips.

haunches, with his fore legs firmly planted on the slope. The rest of the cavalcade swept on. The man who was leading the captive's horse by the riata, thinking only of another accident, dropped the line to save himself from being dragged backward from his horse. The captive wheeled and the next moment was galloping furiously up the slope.

It was the work of a moment, a trained horse and an experienced hand. The cavalcade had covered nearly 50 yards before they could pull up. The freed captive had covered half that distance up hill. The road was so narrow that only two shots could be fired, and these broke dust two yards ahead of the fugitive. They had not dared to fire low. The horse was the more valuable animal. The fugitive knew this in his extremity also and would have gladly taken a shot in his own leg to spare that of his horse. Five men were detached to recapture or kill him. The latter seemed inevitable. But he had calculated his chances. Before they could reload he had reached the woods again. Winding in and out between the pillared tree trunks, he offered no mark. They knew his horse was superior to their own. At the end of two hours they returned, for he had disappeared without track or trail. The end was briefly told in The Sierra Record:

"Red Pete, the notorious horse thief who has so long eluded justice, was captured and hung by the Sawyers Crossing vigilantes last week. His confederate unfortunately escaped on a valuable horse belonging to Judge Boompointer. The judge had refused $1,000 for the horse only a week before. As the thief, who is still at large, would find it difficult to dispose of so valuable an animal without detection, the chances are against either of them turning up again."

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Salomy Jane watched the cavalcade until it had disappeared. Then she became aware that her brief popularity had passed. Mrs. Red Pete, in stormy hysterics, had included her in a sweeping denunciation of the whole uni-

"I'll tell him that when he's on his way to be hung I'll kiss him."

verse, possibly for simulating an emotion in which she herself was deficient. The other women hated her for her momentary exaltation above them. Only the children still admired her as one who had undoubtedly "canoodled" with a man "a-goin to be hung," a dazing flight beyond their wildest ambition. Salomy Jane accepted the change with charming unconcern. She put on her yellow nankeen sunbonnet, a hideous affair that would have ruined any other woman, but which only enhanced the piquancy of her fresh brunette skin, tied the strings, letting the blue black braids escape below its frilled curtain behind, jumped on her mustang with a casual display of agile ankles in shapely white stockings, whistled to the hound and, waving her hand with a "So long, sonny!" to the lately bereft but admiring nephew, flapped and fluttered away in her short brown holland gown.

Her father's house was four miles distant. Contrasted with the cabin she had just quitted, it was a superior dwelling, with a long "lean to" at the rear, which brought the eaves almost to the ground and made it look like a low triangle. It had a long barn and cattle sheds, for Madison Clay was a "great" stock raiser and the owner of a "quarter section." It had a sitting room and a parlor organ, whose transportation thither had been a marvel of packing. These things were supposed to give Salomy Jane an undue importance, but the girl's reserve and inaccessibility to local advances were rather the result of a cool, lazy temperament and the preoccupation of a large, protecting admiration for her father, for some years a widower.

Mr. Madison Clay's life had been threatened in one or two feuds—it was said, not without cause—and it is possible that the pathetic spectacle of her father doing his visiting with a shotgun may have touched her closely and somewhat prejudiced her against the neighboring masculinity. The thought that cattle, horses and "quarter section" would one day be hers did not disturb her calm. As for Mr. Clay, he accepted her as housewifely, though somewhat interfering, and, being one of his own womankind, therefore not without some degree of merit.

"Wot's this yere I'm hearin of your doin's over at Red Pete's? Honeyfoglin with a horse thief, eh?" said Mr. Clay two days later at breakfast.

"I reckon you heard about the straight thing, then," said Salomy Jane unconcernedly, without looking around.

"Wot do you kalkilate Rube will say to it? Wot are you goin to tell him?" said Mr. Clay sarcastically.

Rube, or Reuben, Waters was a swain supposed to be favored particularly by Mr. Clay. Salomy Jane looked up.

"I'll tell him that when he's on his way to be hung I'll kiss him, not till then," said the young lady brightly.

This delightful witticism suited the paternal humor, and Mr. Clay smiled, but nevertheless he frowned a moment afterward.

"But this yere hoss thief got away